DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 042 505 PS 003 417

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TITLE	The Southside Experiment in Personalized Education.
INSTITUTION	Duke Univ., Durham, N.C.
SPONS AGENCY	Ford Foundation, New York, N.Y.
PUB DATE	10 Apr 69
NOTE	16p.; Article based on remarks presented at the National Society for Programmed Instruction Annual Convention, Washington, D.C., April 10, 1969
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$0.90
DESCRIPTORS	*Audiovisual Aids, Classroom Environment, *Curriculum Planning, *Elementary School Curriculum, Experimental Programs, *Individualized Instruction, Program Content, *Programed Instruction, Student Grouping, Student Participation, Student Teacher Relationship
IDENTIFIERS	Dalton Plan, Durham Education Improvement Program, Individually Prescribed Instruction, *Personalized Educational Programming

ABSTRACT

In order to provide more participation by students in making the day-to-day decisions of academic life, the Southside School in Durham, North Carolina is presently involved in a 5-year experimental program for disadvantaged children. A part of that program is a pilot project of individualized instruction which permits continuous progress with increasing degrees of freedom, responsibility, and decision-making on the part of the students. The project, called Personalized Educational Programming, involves 60 first-, second-, and third-graders who are grouped into four family groups or "prides" that meet periodically for planning or group activity. Each child plans his own daily schedule with the assistance of a teacher and within the specific time constraints and subject requirements for that day. Guidelines, suggested projects, and sample schedules are posted for students' perusal. The amount of freedom and autonomy an individual student is permitted depends on his past demonstrations of personal responsibility. The project has been operating since September, 1968, and evaluations are scheduled for summer, 1969, and the 1969-70 school year. (MH)

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The Southside Experiment in Personalized Education[1]

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The concept of individualized instruction refers to a wide range of efforts of educators to tailor the educational programs of the schools to fit the individual levels of achievement and rates of development exhibited by individual learners. The literature on child and adolescent development shows that normal growth and development occur at various rates from year to year as a child matures and vary considerably from child to child. Educational programs based on statistically derived patterns of average growth and development are bound to match poorly the developmental and growth needs of most of the individuals in any given student population. Results of longitudinal studies have shown that within the normal population a great many different patterns of development regularly occur. Some of these differences are influenced by genetic or consitutional factors while others are governed by environmental settings and contingencies. Children from different

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[1]This article is based on remarks presented at the National Society for Programmed Instruction annual convention, Sheraton Park Hotel, Washington, D. C., April 10, 1969.

[2]The Durham Education Improvement Program: A project of the Ford Foundation under the auspices of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools whose Education Improvement Project is funded by the Ford and Danforth Foundations. The Durham EIP is jointly administered by Duke University, North Carolina College, Durham City Schools, Durham County Schools, and Operation Breakthrough, Inc.

cultural backgrounds are socialized and acculturated in various ways and are differentially responsive to the school culture. In the area of cognition, each child brings to the classroom a history of environmental encounters which contributes ideosyncratically to his current patterns of thinking and learning. The complexities and intricacies of individualized patterns of environmental transaction make it impossible for any teacher to plan and prescribe a program of instruction which would be completely appropriate to the individual educational needs of each and every child in her class.

Even though it may never be possible for a teacher to plan and prescribe a school program which would allow for maximal learning on the part of each child in her class, many teachers have found it feasible to move away from a uniform instructional program, to which all children must adjust, to a differentiated curriculum which takes into some account the differential rates of development and levels of achievement which are present in their classes. These attempts by teachers to meet the individual needs of children have taken many forms and new administrative instructional arrangements are continually being invented. Among the most well known have been: ability grouping, interest grouping, achievement grouping, individual contracts, tutoring, emergent curricula, unit teaching, project or activity programs, and programmed instruction. Each of these adaptations has been tried out with enthusiasm at one time or another as a possible solution to the perennial problem of individualized education. However, the history of educational innovation has shown that none has yet completely succeeded in meeting all of the individual needs of the diversity of children in the public schools.

The Problem of Diagnosis and Prescription

A basic problem which underlies all of the efforts of teachers and administrators to modify the current educational programs of the public schools to meet the needs of individual children is the problem of adequate diagnosis of needs at each point in the educational development of an individual child. A corollary problem to the diagnostic one is the problem of treatment. Not only must diagnosis be accurate but treatments appropriate to each of the developmental problems presented by children must be developed and tested so that a teacher can know which procedure to use once she has recognized the difficulty that an individual child may be having. Those who have watched the development of Individually Prescribed Instruction (IPI) developed by Robert Glaser, Joseph Lipson, et al., of the Pittsburgh R & D Center, are aware of the tremendous complexities involved in diagnosing individual cognitive development in a structured area such as mathematics or language and in prescribing appropriate educational encounters for individual learners.

Assuming that accurate diagnosis and appropriate assignment of learning experiences can be made in highly structured fields such as mathematics, language, or science, there remain very considerable problems in developing school management systems which will utilize programmed materials keyed to diagnostic or evaluative instrumentalities. Without seeking to convey the idea that these efforts for diagnosis and prescription of appropriate learning experiences should be in any way curtailed, I feel that alternative approaches should be pursued. They may prove to be more fruitful and less expensive.

Underlying the development of most continuous progress plans, as well as the Individually Prescribed Instruction (IPI) system, is the assumption that the teacher or a teacher's aide or some other representative of the school will remain in control of the educational program and that the child will remain in a dependent relationship to the authorities of the school who administer the diagnostic and prescriptive procedures. The concept of control over the programming of the curriculum presented in the schools is inherent in most of the commonly practiced programs of individualized instruction. It is the reluctance of the school authorities to share control over the educational experiences that are provided the students that underlies much of the current unrest among students in our schools and colleges. As long as the school authorities insist upon maintaining direct control and refuse to share in the process of diagnosis and selection of appropriate learning experiences individual students will be frustrated by the pattern of instruction which is presented them. What is relevant cognitively to one learner is irrelevant to another; and no teacher, however well trained and however experienced, will ever be able to anticipate how any particular program of experiences provided by the school will transform the cognitive structures of each of the individual learners. The demand by students to share in the decision making process within the educational enterprise stems mainly from the frustration they experience as they are required to participate in meaningless, trivial, or redundant curricular offerings.

Freedom, Responsibility, and Decision Making in Education

Any innovation purporting to meet the needs of individual students in American education today must take into account the increasing demand by students that their educational experiences be relevant. To assure relevance all teachers must be past masters at accurate diagnosis of individual levels of achievement, rates of development, cultural backgrounds and ideosyncratic patterns of cognitive development. They must also be aware of possible educational alternatives so that they might select the ones emminently appropriate to individual learners. That any such state of affairs will ever be possible in American education is quite unlikely. What, then, can school administrators and teachers do to meet the demands for educational relevancy?

Students themselves have provided a clue. Their argument in a word - "participation." If one listens to students these days, their argument boils down to the assertion that only the learner himself can experience the relevancy of his own environmental encounters. If one grants to students the validity of this assertion, what, then, is the role of the school? How much sharing in decision making about curricular experiences should be allowed? Within what limits and with regard to what goals should decision making on the part of students be permitted? How might school organizations be restructured to permit greater freedom, responsibility, and decision making on the part of students?

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The answers to these questions are not readily available and only after a period of experimentation with new systems of educational organization and instructional programming will some tentative answers be found. At the present time the evidence is clear that answers are needed. Students demand more freedom, want more responsibility, and insist upon their right to participate in decision making which affects their own educational opportunities, occupations, careers, and sense of well being.

An Experiment in Personalized Educational Programming (PEP)

A program of individualized instruction which permits continous progress with increasing degrees of freedom, responsibility, and decision making is underway at the Southside School in Durham, North Carolina as part of a five-year experimental program for disadvantaged children. The program at the Southside School in Durham is part of the Durham Education Improvement Program, a Ford Foundation funded study of the developmental patterns of approximately 200 children growing up in low income settings and of the effects of various types of educational intervention. One intervention currently being investigated at the Southside School is called Personalized Educational Programming (PEP) since it is designed to personalize the educational program to the extent that each child participates in decision making concerning his daily educational program with increasing degrees of freedom and responsibility.

The PEP experiment at Southside School is based upon educational concepts developed by Carleton Washburne and Helen Parkhurst during the 1920's and 30's in Winnetka, Illinois and Dalton, Massachusetts. The Dalton School in New York City continues to operate under the Dalton Plan. In both the Winnetka and Dalton plans, students were expected to undertake assignments or contracts and work at them at their own rates and for as much time as necessary to complete them within an allotted or contractual period. Individual learners were given increasing responsibility as they demonstrated the ability to complete contracts on time or to meet deadlines for specific assignments. In the Dalton Plan, as operated in New York during the 1950's, students were given monthly assignments which were uniform for a specific grade level. Since the Dalton School enrolls children from high income families, uniform assignments based on grade level norms were accomplished by most students. Where individual differences in ability made accomplishment of the assignments unlikely teachers were given the authority to lower their expectations for a specific child so that students with less competence could continue to participate with the class as a whole. However, most slowly developing students were tutored (out of school) to keep them from falling behind the school's grade norms.

In a series of adaptations of the basic Dalton Plan tried out by the author in a number of public schools at the third, fourth, seventh, and eighth grade levels it was found that the uniform assignment system was inappropriate for most public school situations. A modified Dalton Plan was worked out at the Hopland Elementary

School in Hopland, California which allowed for student participation in choosing activities and tasks appropriate to individual levels of achievement and areas of interest. In the Hopland program the contractual idea, taken from Carleton Washburne's work, was incorporated into the basic Dalton Plan. The Hopland Plan proved feasible in an ungraded seventh and eighth grade combination class of 30 children in which the level of achievement varied from second grade through grade 13. The pupils in the Hopland class were from unemployed families on an Indian reservation, from farm families, and from the families of business and professional persons in the community. The Hopland program was designed to be conducted in a self contained classroom by one teacher, but it has formed the basic rationale and structure of the PEP program in Southside School which enrolls approximately 60 children of grades one, two and three.

The Southside Plan

The 60 boys and girls who are enrolled in Southside School in grades one, two, and three are grouped into four family groups or "prides" which meet together from 8:30 to 9:00 for planning purposes and meet again from time to time during the day as a group, whenever a group activity, such as a field trip or a physical education activity, would warrant their association as a total group. The pride is made up of children from each of the three age groups represented in the primary school and is carefully composed to present a heterogeneous group. The variables used in composing the prides are level of academic achievement, rate

of learning, degree of socialization, sex, and race. In the first year of the pilot program two prides were composed of nonreaders and two prides were composed of children who had some skill in reading. This accommodation to ability grouping was made as a transitional step to next year's program when each pride will have representatives from the full range of abilities.

The PEP program begins at 8:30 with each of the children going to his pride. From 8:30 until 9:00, each child plans his daily schedule with the assistance of his pride teacher or a teacher's aide. In order to complete his plan for the day he examines several posted schedules and pays attention to specific requirements or constraints. Each day the pride teacher lists on a "conference schedule" the conferences that each child is expected to attend during the day. Some of these she will teach, and others will be the responsibility of other teachers in the school, but each child is expected to examine the conference schedule and put down on his "daily plan" opposite the appropriate time the location and the subject of the conference. Once he has examined the conference schedule and placed the conferences on his daily plan, he is ready to begin to plan his open laboratory time. Constraints on his freedom are listed on the wall, a chart rack, or the bottom of his daily plan sheet. In general, these constraints impose upon him the requirement that he spend at least a half hour in mathematics, reading, writing, and spelling practice and an additional half hour in a project activity in either social studies, art, music, or science. Some of the scheduled conferences will satisfy requirements in one or another of these academic areas, and if so, the child can omit that area

from his planning. When he has completed his daily plan all of the activities on the required list are to be included somewhere in his plan.

Planning Guidelines

Lists of possible ways in which a child may satisfy time requirements in math, reading, writing, or spelling practice are posted. Suggested projects in social studies, art, music, and science are also given, but he may also derive projects on his own from social studies or science units which are introduced to him by teachers during group conferences in social studies or science. In fact, teachers encourage students to pick individual projects which will aid the unit of group study in social studies or science.

Work Stations and Traffic Control

In completing a daily plan each child examines the "work station schedule" which gives the times that each work station is open and the number of children permitted to sign up for each of the stations at any given hour. In designing his daily schedule the student picks a work station for each period during the day and inserts his name opposite the work station - providing the maximum number allowed at the station has not been reached. He continues to pick activities and work stations, placing them on his daily plan sheet until he has filled in all the open time slots. He will, of course, include time for going to lunch, physical education, and other routine activities in which he is expected to participate.

With his daily plan completed each pupil gets a signature indicating approval from his pride teacher or from a teacher aide and then begins his activities for the day. Throughout the day he is expected to have his daily plan sheet with him. All the teachers in the program are encouraged to examine the daily plans of any child who comes to a work station and to place on the plan a symbol, such as a star or a set of initials, to indicate to the child and to the pride teacher that this individual student has arrived at a particular station on schedule. Similar symbols are also placed on the daily plans to indicate display of appropriate study habits, work underway at the proper time, or completed on schedule. Positive comments for quality work, creative ideas or products, or developing skills are also placed on the plan sheets.

Allowances for Individual Differences in Ability to Plan

Since decision making and planning are complex processes which must be learned, children are given very small degrees of freedom in the beginning of the program during the Fall. Their programs are planned completely the first two or three weeks by teachers or aides much as in a conventional, teacher-directed program. After student familiarity with the work stations and with the "daily plan" has been accomplished, those students who show the ability to read time and govern themselves in a responsible manner are given a half-hour time slot in which to mark a choice of an appropriate activity and a place to complete the activity. After operating successfully for a week or so with one half-hour slot available for choice making, additional half hour periods are made available.

gradually - consistent with each child's ability to govern himself and to operate with greater and greater freedom. In all cases, however, his choices are constrained by the guidelines posted in his pride and listed on his plan sheet. In addition, each pride teacher holds routine weekly or bi-weekly conferences with individual pupils to review their daily plans (for the past week or two) and to make recommendations regarding how their plans and performance might be improved. In some cases some degrees of freedom (a few time slots) might be taken away for a period of a week or two until performance is improved. In other cases increased freedom would be awarded. The pride teachers keep records of individual pupil conferences and the records form the basis of parent conferences, as well as judgments regarding specific instructional programs which are needed for individuals and small groups of children within the prides.

Reporting to parents and to pupils is based upon the daily plan sheets and progress records kept by the teachers. The progress records accumulated by the teacher through weekly or bi-weekly conferences are supplemented by standardized tests and other evaluative instruments associated with programmed materials.

When individual students have progressed to the point where they can plan for more than one day at a time, a weekly plan sheet will be used to permit students to work out projects which will take several days to complete. Weekly plans or even monthly plans will eventually be employed by most students in the middle grades. When students are using weekly or monthly plans, it wi'l be

possible to incorporate out-of-school activities into the overall instructional program as individual students see the relevance of out-of-school activities to their inschool projects.

Use of Programmed Materials, Automated Equipment, Instructional Aides, Ancillary Instructional Systems, and Specialized Personnel

The Southside PEP program is extremely flexible and permits the involvement of ancillary equipment, materials, resource centers, and specialized personnel. To enrich the curricular offerings film strip cartridge, slide, 8 mm., and overhead projectors; tape recorders; headsets; phonograph records; games; and other kinds of instructional materials and automated equipment are available to children as additional resources which can be used in laboratory time. Special conferences are scheduled to introduce the mechanics of operating new equipment and then individual children are instructed and checked out on the equipment to compose a list of those who can freely choose to operate the equipment on their own during laboratory time. Other, less skilled children are assisted by an aide.

A variety of programmed materials such as reading laboratories and IPI mathematics are made available to the children in the resource center. Special teachers with one or two hours a week available are included in the program with their available time slots listed in the work station schedule. Teachers assign some of the children, while others who are more reliable schedule themselves during lab time. When new teachers or new equipment are introduced

into the school pride teachers set up special instructional conferences in which the new laboratory opportunities are discussed and the new equipment is demonstrated.

Balancing Group Projects and Activities with Individualized Instruction and Study

Since social skills, concepts, and interpersonal relations are best learned through group activity it is important that pride teachers plan the social studies program carefully to involve all of the children in the school. Many individualized programs have tended to isolate children from one another and reduce the amount of peer interaction and group learning. In the PEP program pride teachers plan units of study in the social studies which become a major source of group goals and activities. Out of the units of study come many small group and individual projects which are carried on in laboratory time, but the overall goals of the units are planned by the teachers. Many academic skills are practiced in social studies projects, but they are taught additionally in special instructional conferences focusing on each of the skill areas.

Prospects for Personalized Educational Programming

The Southside School pilot program has been operating since September 1968, with approximately 60 children from low income families in Durham, North Carolina. It will be evaluated during the Summer of 1969 and developed further during academic 1969-70.

At this point in the pilot program, approximately five months after the beginning at Southside School, it can be said that some children are able to handle substantial amounts of their own educational activities in responsible manners. Many of the children who are in our disadvantaged group are unreliable and need constant supervision and direct instruction, but evidence indicates that progress has been made toward more responsible behavior on the part of most if not all of the children in the project. The greatest problems have occurred where noise and movement have interfered with instruction in groups occupying adjacent work areas. These problems are being attended to in the design of the physical layout for the school in the coming year. In the current program distraction through movement and noise is a major deterrent to effective communication in the instructional centers. It is believed that with changes in the physical arrangement of instructional areas and work stations that many of the problems of interference can be overcome.

Summary

The major thesis of this paper is that the future of individualized instruction in the public schools is very much a function of the degree to which school authorities can develop systems which will transfer greater and greater degrees of decision making power to children within carefully structured limits which permit the effective application of energies by teachers and children within the total educational enterprise. The problem of socialization within a technological society

has become increasingly complex as mobility has increased and patterns of employment have been transformed. New educational systems are urgently needed to prepare all children to govern themselves and assume a greater responsibility in guiding their own educational experiences. Any system of education which is designed to be controlled completely by school authorities, however individualized it may be, seems to this observer to be incompatible with the economic and social imperatives of modern, technological America.

Students are demanding relevancy in all of their educational experiences, and none of our educational institutions are exempt from increasing pressure to abandon instructional and administrative patterns which are no longer appropriate to the educational needs of students.

The innovative program at the Southside School in Durham, North Carolina is offered as one of the many possible alternatives which offer increased degrees of freedom and decision making within gradually broadened limits. Learning to use freedom responsibly is fundamental to the effective acquisition and use of knowledge in a democracy.